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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON ISRAELI ASSASSINATION
ATTEMPT AGAINST HAMAS' RANTISI

Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, June 11, highlights Israel's failed assassination attempt against the life of Hamas leader Abdul Aziz Rantisi in Gaza yesterday. Some reports feature President Bush's reaction to the attempt; while all reports featured the Palestinian Authority's denunciation of the assassination attempt and Hamas' "promise" to retaliate.

Editorial Commentary

-- "An attempt to assassinate Rantisi or the peace efforts?"

Daily columnist Mohammad Amayreh writes on the op-ed page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (06/11): "Right from the beginning, we said that it is difficult to be reassured by Sharon's promises or by his intentions towards implementing the roadmap. The Israeli army, yesterday, tried to assassinate one of the Hamas leaders in Gaza. This assassination attempt, for which Israeli helicopters were used, was undoubtedly sanctioned by Sharon. Even though the Israeli government categorizes this attempt as part of combating terrorism, the outcome contradicts everything that was agreed upon, including the truce or ceasefire agreement and the promise to grant the Palestinian prime minister the opportunity to deal with the Palestinian factions to try to convince them to stop the so-called 'violence'. This assassination attempt, which is not the first of its kind, constitutes a clear Israeli effort to impede the implementation of the roadmap. It is a crime to be added to Sharon's already full record of bloody crimes against the Palestinian people and their combatant forces."

-- "Assassinating Rantisi or Abu Mazen?"

Daily columnist Sultan Hattab writes on the op-ed page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (06/11): "Why would Sharon put Abu Mazen in this corner? Why would he want to abort Abu Mazen's mission and not allow him the chance to do the necessary on the part of the Palestinians to fulfill the roadmap? The issue therefore is not an issue of searching for security, stability and calm. Rather, the Israeli right-wing is trying to impose their own vision and conditions in order to eliminate the pulse of the Palestinians and to destroy the infrastructure of the Palestinian resistance, leading to uprooting the Palestinian people."

-- "The Palestinian struggle is not a charitable organization!"

Chief Editor Taher Udwan writes on the back page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (06/11): "The assassination attempt against the life of Hamas leader Abdul Aziz Rantisi in Gaza yesterday shows once more that the problem in the Middle East is not the 'terrorism' of the Palestinians, but the terrorism of the Israeli state. The American complicity in these assassinations perpetrated by the Sharon government, when Palestinian resistance operations are looked upon as terrorism and aggression is regrettable and degrading. Sharon's criminal act in Gaza, and not Hamas' rejection of dialogue with Abu Mazen, is the indication of the future that awaits the roadmap. The extremist Israeli government is going to take advantage of the roadmap to escalate its provocations and aggression against the Palestinian people. Israel is the one that is encouraging violence, pouring oil on an already raging fire every time there is a sign of hope for getting out of the vicious circle of killing and destruction. Sharon's

operation yesterday must not be a reason to stop or suspend dialogue among the Palestinians. If there are any priorities on the Palestinian agenda now, maintaining the Palestinian national unity should be top of that priority list.. If there is to be a Palestinian political response to the assassination attempt, it should that which stresses the Palestinian dialogue and emphasizes the option of resistance, because the resistance is the main card that the Palestinians have as long as the occupation exists.. The criminal Gaza operation shows that Sharon views the roadmap as a means to ignite Palestinian civil war, nothing more and nothing less."

-- "Attempting to assassinate the roadmap"

Daily columnist Urayb Rintawi writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (06/11): "Israel's assassination attempt against Abdul Aziz Rantisi was nothing but an attempt to abort the roadmap and this opportunity to achieve just and lasting peace.. Israel would not have gone this far in its insane war against the Palestinian people and in its bloody targeting of the peace process and with its Palestinian rights and lives, had it not been for America's silence about these crimes and the encouragement that the extremist and blood-thirsty right-wing Israelis receive from the U.S. administration. Washington placed the war criminal on a pedestal, and it is up to it alone to bring him down from it, if it really wants to give peace a chance."

-- "Who blames Sharon?"

Centrist, influential among the elite English daily Jordan Times (06/11) editorializes: "It just does not sink in with Ariel Sharon that violence breeds violence. Hamas is indeed an obstacle to both the implementation of the roadmap and prospects for peace and stability in the entire region. But bombing Gaza's residential and most densely populated areas, killing three innocent Palestinians and injuring scores of people in an attempt to take the life of one of Hamas' most popular leaders is only going to undermine, not help, the cause of peace. It would be no exaggeration to say that no one is more eager than the Palestinian National Authority to see Hamas relegated to the fringes of Palestinian politics. But political assassinations or attempts on the life of leaders such as Abdul Aziz Rantisi only strengthen Hamas and play in the hands of extremist groups.. This umpteenth episode of Israeli state terrorism is bound to be echoed by more terrorist operations by Hamas. The circle of violence has been activated. What was a truce has ended in another terrible military escalation against Palestinian civilians.. For peace to get a chance, at some point, someone will have to put the blame where it belongs."

GNEHM